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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project implemented by a social worker from the Glynn County School District in rural Georgia to address transportation problems experienced by students and their families. The project aims to assist families who are unable to keep appointments or attend other important events due to unreliable transportation. A county needs assessment indicated that county residents ranked lack of public transportation third as a problem area, behind access to education and health facilities. The project involves a coalition between the school system, local autoparts suppliers, and housing authority personnel to help parents maintain older automobiles and access auto mechanics who provide reliable, low-cost services. In addition, an annual cookout and social allows families to have their car maintenanced by professionals. Prizes are given away such as tool sets, car polish, and free oil changes. This event not only helps rural families maintain reliable transportation, but also benefits car parts stores and maintenance shops that are looking to expand their business. (LP)

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Autocheck-Addressing the problem of Rural Transportation

In our predominately rural county, there does not presently exist public transportation. In several needs assessments, the need for transportation ranked third as a problem area, behind education and health facilities access. In spite of a long standing need, revenues expected from public transportation do not provide enough incentive for private companies to form a bus service, nor is the County interested in providing a county provided service.

In my capacity as a Family Services Coordinator for the school system, I have found it especially frustrating to set up appointments, provide educational training workshops/seminars and act as a hospital/DFACS/Medical "appointment maker" only to have it all come to nothing because of transportation difficulties experienced by the needy parties.

I formed a coalition with local autoparts suppliers, Housing Authority personnel and high risk parents to provide assistance with maintaining their older automobiles, finding access to auto mechanics who provide reliable, low cost assistance to the families, etc. In addition, we arrange a cookout, music, a "door" prize drawing every 10-15 minutes for tool sets, car polish, free oil changes, etc.

The following outline presents what has worked in our rural community for helping, enhancing and maintaining an already established - and existing - network of transportation. Additional efforts are being made to include dependable, reliable and honest (!) used car dealers who would provide reasonable transportation at discounted prices, for the daily event of "Autocheck". Additionally, insurance companies and wholesale dealerships would be invited to display special merchandise for that day.

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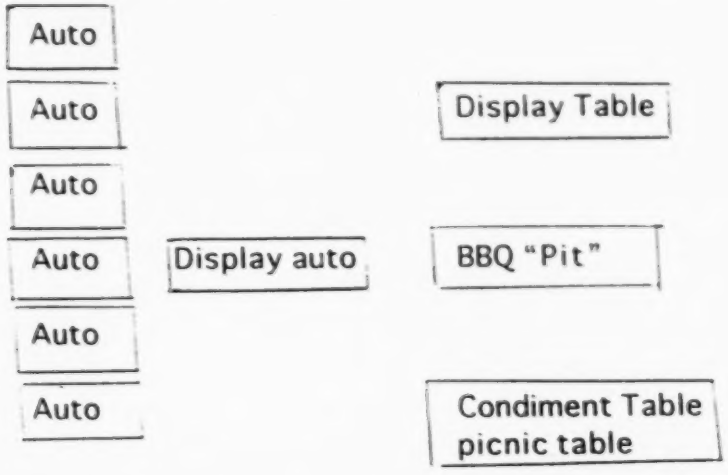
One of the unexpected side effects of this effort has been the bonding of disparate peoples in the community. We have held the events in strategically spaced housing projects and when the people being to gather for hot-dogs, hamburgers, drinks, review the handouts and get free hats, there is a festive atmosphere that seems to bring the people together. One could say that for a Family Services Coordinator and School Social Worker, that all the high risk family groups represent a "target rich environment!"

Programaticaly, the program readily adapts itself to both rural situations and inner city areas. The requirements are simple:

1. Several committed persons who are multi-talented enough to barbeque hot-dogs/hamburgers, change a tire and check the oil, and relate to the public;

2. Several (preferably local) car parts stores/maintenance shops who are looking to expand their business/public exposure;

3. A large enough flat area (parking lots, large back yards are ideal) to accommodate 15-20 cars, a barbeque pit and a table to display "give-aways" and handout material. A typical area set-up may look as follows:



4. The "display auto" is a car that is attractive, well maintained and can be used to easily see the different areas high-

lighted by the event (dipstick, window-washer fluids, radiator, etc)

5. Autos of owners to be "checked" are together, usually lined up with hoods open, ready for belt checks, oil checks, filter checks, etc. with owner participation.

AutoZone, a local autoparts store, has been most helpful in support of this endeavor. NAPA is another autoparts store that has shown interest; the local AutoZone store's manager had a child in "our" Pre-K program, so was the most logical community retailer with which to initiate communications. They have provided talented personnel, "door" prizes, literature and expertise to the local community who have been attracted to the Autocheck's activities.

The Brunswick Housing Authority had been trying for some time to bring in outlying communities with different types of activities; barbeques, health forums, etc. and reacted with enthusiasm to this program. They, too, have provided personnel and organizational support for each program that we have jointly sponsored.

This program has proven adaptable to physical changes (we have used parking lots, parks, etc) and amenable to different presentations (lots of music, no music, many door prizes, none, etc), and should be adaptable to many kinds of situations and needs.